

Minutes of the 1st meeting of the Estonian-Latvian Working Group for determining, prioritizing and coordinating the list of road sections for reconstruction in the border area

Participants:

Mr Imre Jugomäe, Mayor of Mulgi Municipality
Mr Margus Lepik, Mayor of Valga Municipality
Mr Peeter Rahnel, Member of the Riigikogu
Mr Guntis Gladkins, Mayor of Rūjienas Novads
Mr Harijs Rokpelnis, Mayor of Mazsalaca Novads
Mr Vents Armands Krauklis, Mayor of Valka Novads
Mr Jānis Zuments, Mayor of Naukšēni Novads
Mr Hannes Nagel, Estonian Ministry of Finance

AGENDA

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1. Overview of the IGC agenda border area road issue

Mr Hannes Nagel informed that in 2018, Latvian-Estonian GC proposes a new issue for the IGC agenda – *Determination, prioritisation and coordination of the list of road sections for reconstruction in the border area*. During the 2018 Joint Session of the it was decided a) to include the issue to the 2019 IGC agenda and b) to initiate the working group and to start working on the issue of determination, prioritisation and coordination of the list of road sections for reconstruction in the border area. So far the issue had neither been dealt with nor a working group established and there is little which could have been reported as progress.

At the same time the national road administrations have not held consultations in regard of the creation of the determined, prioritised and coordinated list of road sections in the border area. Thus, the **October 3** meeting is the first practical step under this IGC agenda point, almost **10** months after it was included into the agenda.

During the 1st Joint Session of the Estonian and Latvian Governments' in 2018, it was decided that the following border area road sections are priorities and there is a need to find appropriate financial resources for their renovation: 1) "V372 Gaujiena – Lejaskrogs – Eesti-Läti piir – Taheva – Valga", 2) "V381 Bārdaskrogs – Eesti-Läti piir – Krabi – Metstaga" and 3) „V256 Ērgeme – Omuļi – Eesti-Läti piir –

Kõrtsi – Tõrva“. Not all of the listed road sections coincide with the development needs of the border area Estonian and Latvian local municipalities.

2. Overview of the border area local cross-border infrastructure development's needs

Municipality of Mulgi: Mr. Imre Jugomäe gave an overview about the municipality infrastructure development needs and highlighted the following list of prioritized road sections that are crucial for the municipality in regard of the socio-economic development and increase of cross-border mobility and cooperation:

1. Abja-Paluoja – Penuja – Lode – Ruhja
2. Mõisaküla – Ipiki – Ruhja
3. Mulgi vald – Laatre – Vilpulka – Ruhja

Mr Jugomäe also pointed out that unfortunately neither the relevant Estonian and Latvian ministries and road authorities were unable to participate the meeting.

Municipality of Valga: Mr. Margus Lepik gave an overview about the municipality infrastructure development needs and highlighted the following list of prioritized road sections that are crucial for the municipality in regard of the socio-economic development and increase of cross-border mobility and cooperation:

1. Ramsi bridge
2. Gaujiena – Lejaskrogs – Taheva – Valga
3. Ērgeme – Omuļi – Kõrtsi – Tõrva

Municipality of Valka: Mr. Vents Armands Krauklis gave an overview about the municipality infrastructure development needs and highlighted the following list of prioritized road sections that are crucial for the municipality in regard of the socio-economic development and increase of cross-border mobility and cooperation:

1. Ramsi bridge
2. Gaujiena – Lejaskrogs – Taheva – Valga
3. Ērgeme – Omuļi – Kõrtsi – Tõrva

Municipality of Rūjiena: Mr. Guntis Gladkins gave an overview about the municipality infrastructure development needs and highlighted the following list of prioritized road sections that are crucial for the municipality in regard of the socio-economic development and increase of cross-border mobility and cooperation:

1. Abja-Paluoja – Penuja – Lode – Ruhja
2. Mõisaküla – Mulgi vald – Ipiki – Ruhja
3. Mulgi vald – Laatre – Vilpulka – Ruhja

Municipality of Mazsalaca: Mr. Harijs Rokpelnis told that currently there are no specific road sections that are in need of repair in the municipality but there is a need to highlight the socio-economic effect of the cross-border road renovation on the example of Kilingi-Nõmme – Mazsalaca Estonian and Latvian roads sections that were renovated with the help of Estonia-Latvia 2007-2013 programme. He pointed out that although the road usage did not increase on the first year after the renovation, it began to grow significantly on the following years. Currently the road is used as frequently as the state road P16.

It is crucial for the municipality that road connections with Abja-Paluoja would improve. At the same time he stressed the importance of the border area roads that do not directly cross the border but are situated parallel to the state borders thus facilitating and directing in the close proximity of the state

borders. Municipality of Mazsalace supports the renovation of neighbouring municipalities road sections as they also affect municipalities development.

Mr. Rokpelnis pointed out that unfortunately the Vidzeme Planning Region was unable to attend the meeting. He also suggested that the new Estonia-Latvia programme 2021-2027 could focus on the mainland infrastructure as the Estonian-Latvian network of small harbours is being completed with the current Estonia-Latvia programme 2014-2020.

Municipality of Naukšēni: Mr. Jānis Zuments gave an overview about the municipality infrastructure development needs and highlighted the following list of prioritized road sections that are crucial for the municipality in regard of the socio-economic development and increase of cross-border mobility and cooperation:

1. Abja-Paluoja – Penuja – Lode – Ruhja
2. Ērgeme – Omuļi – Kōrtsi – Tōrva

3. Round table discussion for initiating the joint determination and coordination of the list of road sections for reconstruction in the border area

During the discussion it was stated that the border area roads being neither part nor in the close proximity of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) corridors have not received the requested and also urgently needed attention with sufficient financial resources or local government revenue base to improve the border area roads that support cross-border mobility by the respective Governments.

The main problem with the border area roads is the gravel road surface which impedes the socio-economic development of border areas and prevents municipalities from reaping the full benefits of cross-border mobility and employment. In addition, gravel roads pose significant risk for the commuters as they depend largely on weather conditions. All parties acknowledged that the improvement of border area roads will help to stop rural depopulation and peripheralization.

It was also pointed out that border area road section renovations will also contribute to broad-based national defense in Estonia and Latvia as they improve general conditions of mediating military logistics, Allied forces and medical evacuation procedures during the war and crises. The region has several medical brigades stationed along the border area that require better road conditions in order to secure patients safety. Furthermore, better road conditions in border areas will also help to attract more visitors and tourists along with potential investors.

There is a general need to change the national paradigm in regard of border area roads that currently does not support the border area development. Parties identified the following pre-liminary joint list of road sections which is currently not acknowledged by the August 21 2018 Minutes of the 1st meeting of the Governments of the Republic of Estonia and the Government of Latvia, respective Estonian and Latvian ministries and road authorities:

- 1) Abja-Paluoja – Penuja – Lode – Ruhja
- 2) Ramsi bridge
- 3) Mōisakūla – Mulgi vald – Ipiki – Ruhja
- 4) Mulgi vald – Laatre – Vilpulka – Ruhja

4. Conclusions and suggestions for the future and next steps for 2019/2020

During the meeting it was decided:

1. To invite the remaining Estonian (i.e. Municipality of Häädemeeste, Municipality of Saarde, Municipality of Tõrva and Municipality of Rõuge) and Latvian (i.e. Municipality of Ape, Municipality of Aluksne and Municipality of Salacgriva) border area municipalities to join with the Memorandum of Understanding;
2. To specify the identified list of road sections with the relevant data (i.e. official road numbers and names, daily road traffic volumes, approximate renovation costs based on price offerings and relevant justification) by **October 24**;
3. To enlarge the list of road sections once other municipalities have joined the initiative;
4. To approach the Estonian-Latvian Parliamentary Group in Estonia and the Latvian-Estonian Parliamentary Group in Latvia to seek support and assistance.

5. Signing the Memorandum of Understanding

Representatives of municipalities signed the Memorandum of Understanding in which they declared to join efforts and to maintain a close and continuous working relationship for the achievement of their common objectives and for the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding.

6. Location and time of the next meeting

It was decided that the next meeting would be held in **December** in Valga or Valka. The specific date would be further clarified once the participation of relevant ministries, representatives of regions and state road authorities is confirmed in order to initiate the dialogue between all parties.